

May 23, 2006

The Honorable Peter Hoekstra
Chairman
Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence
H-405, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jane Harman
Ranking Member
Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence
H-405, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Hoekstra and Ranking Member Harman:

I am writing in reference to the Committee's May 26 public hearing on unauthorized disclosures of classified information.

The more than 650 daily and weekly newspapers of Illinois recognize the government's duty to protect the national security, but we urge your Committee to avoid legislation criminalizing the "leak" of sensitive information to the press.

Throughout history, the press has served as the voice of the people by informing the public on issues that are essential to the functioning of our democratic society.

Maintaining a healthy democracy requires a clear channel of communication between the government and its people. To date the press has, when appropriate, withheld sensitive government information striking the proper balance between informing the public and respecting the government's need to protect national security.

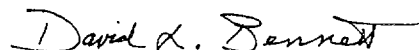
Any attempt to alter the way newspapers maintain this balance would be detrimental to the public's right to know. The "leak" is an important instrument of communication that is essential to keeping the public informed.

The United States government currently has at its disposal the proper tools necessary for dealing with unauthorized leaks of classified information. Formal sanctions, such as removal of security clearance or termination of employment are two such examples that have proven to be effective.

We encourage your committee to not pursue legislation that would hinder the ability of newspapers to shed light on the actions of the people's government.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David L. Bennett".

David L. Bennett
Executive Director
Illinois Press Association